

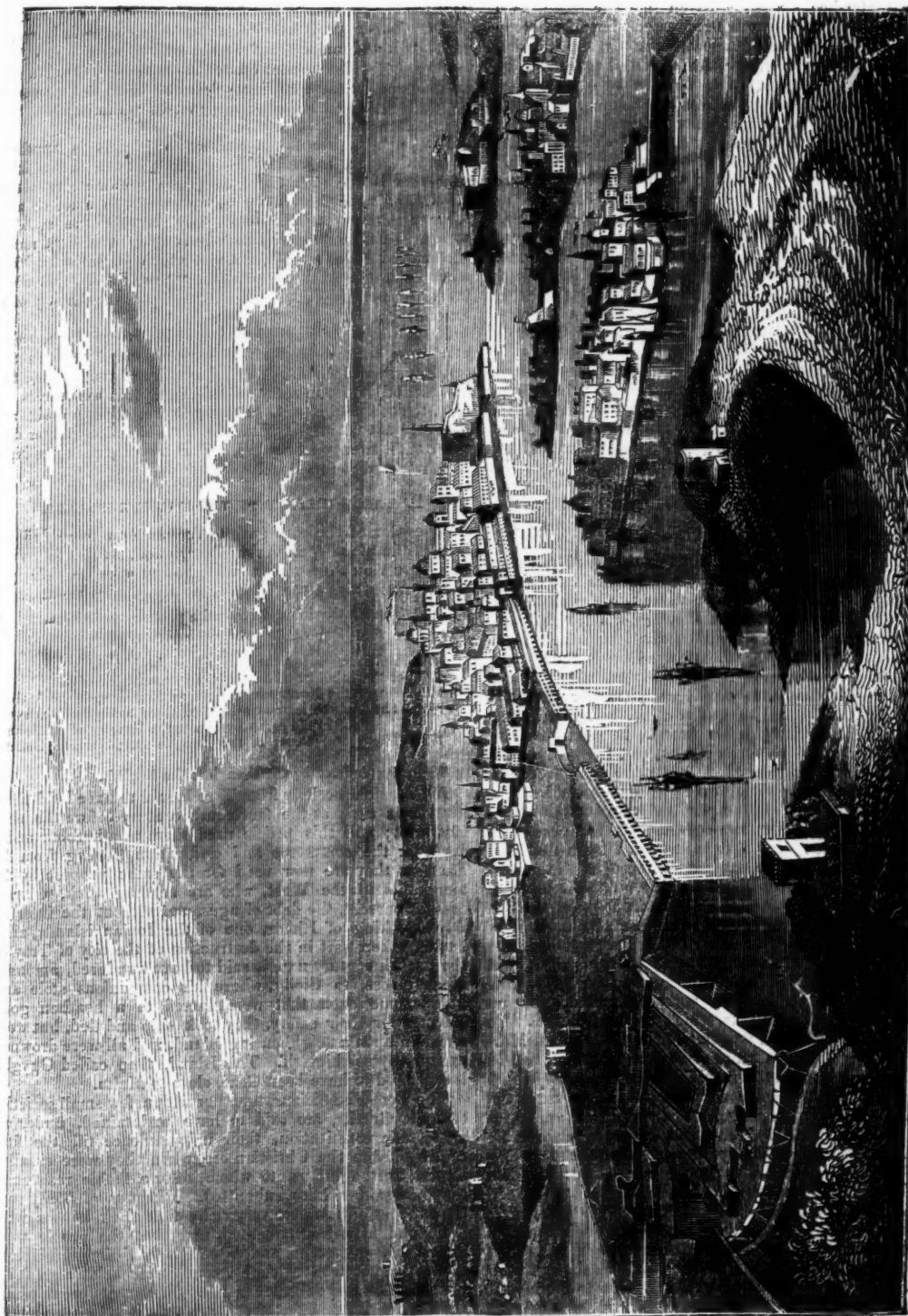
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BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE PORT OF MALTA, AT THE TIME OF THE KNIGHTS.

## SOME ACCOUNT OF MALTA, No. I.

## 1. GENERAL REMARKS.

It is as easy to acquire, as it is difficult to give, the first idea of the places and persons that compose any given history, the mere names of which must be repeated again and again, and as often without imparting any information, unless there previously exist in the reader's mind some definite idea of these elements of knowledge—unless there are some tenter-hooks already driven into the brain, as a clever man has quaintly enough expressed himself, whereon to hang fresh facts and after-associations. In the island of Ithaca, an Ionian lawyer, and an educated man, (for he spoke English,) amongst other strange questions, once asked the writer of this paper how far England was from London; and a clerk in an Athenian government office inquired if France were far distant from America; he has also been asked by an English woman, accomplished at her piano, if Athens were in Greece; and has heard another, a very accomplished musician, describe an occurrence as having taken place "in Madeira, or some other town in Portugal." Add to these, the English in general suppose Demerara to be an island in the West Indies, and Mexico a state of South America; nor is it long since Monmouth has ceased to be in Wales. To record errors is almost as instructive as to register truths; for men are not apt to forget the palpable mistakes of others, while these not unfrequently reflect their own.

Casual occurrences often bring places and persons upon the surface, as it were, of the public mind; individual attention is drawn to a particular subject by the public prints of the day; fact after fact soon accumulates, and excites surprise that so much interesting material could have escaped previous notice. When her gracious majesty the queen dowager Adelaide went there to pass the winter of 1838-9, thousands asked "Where is Malta?" Upon this "tenter-hook" we will try to hang a few of the most important associations of the place.

The Mediterranean Sea is about two thousand miles in length from Gibraltar to Palestine, and the Maltese islands are very nearly half way between these two places. They are a group of low rocky islands, 58 miles, or fourteen hours' sail, in a native boat with a tolerable wind, from the nearest point of Sicily, and 179 miles from Cape Demas, the nearest point on the mainland of Africa. Malta, which is the largest of these islands, is considerably smaller than the Isle of Wight, off the Hampshire coast, being only 17½ miles in length, and 9½ miles broad. It consists of an immense soft, white, calcareous rock, covered with a thin stratum of earth, seldom exceeding more than a foot in depth; of an irregular form, the south-western sides present, for the most part, only perpendicular rocks; the north-east, however, offers several commodious harbours, and Valetta, the present capital, is built upon a tongue of land which divides two of the largest of these at the north-eastern corner of the island. Standing on this tongue of land, with the face towards the north, in front of the beholder, is the tideless Mediterranean, on the horizon of which may be seen, with a clear day and a good eye, the snowy top of *Atina*, 128 miles distant; upon his right, and consequently eastward, is a magnificent harbour 3400 yards in length 450 yards wide at its entrance, and opening up into several convenient inlets, which are land-locked. To the westward and the left is a smaller harbour, called *Marsamuscetto*, signifying a place of shelter, where all vessels from the East are first compelled to pass an appointed period of quarantine before they are allowed to enter the "Grand Harbour." This sketch of the position and capabilities of the capital of Malta will be made clearer by comparing it with the bird's-eye view given on the preceding page. *Marsa Scirocco* Bay to the south-east, and *St. Julian's*, *St. Paul's*, and that of *Melleha* to the north-west, complete the list of the smaller harbours.

The point of land on which Valetta stands is 200 feet above the level of the sea, but as it joins the mainland, it becomes considerably lower; and it is only as the southern shore is neared, that the island gradually rises to the height of several hundred feet. To the westward of the city, however, a ridge of land, running north and south, divides the island into two unequal parts. There are no streams

in Malta, and but few springs. The principal defiles and valleys run from south-west to north-east.

About three miles and a-half to the north-west of Malta is another island called Gozo, ten miles long, by more than five in breadth, and of an oval form. It is bounded by perpendicular rocks on all sides, which in one part rise to the height of 570 feet above the level of the sea, and this particular point serves as a landmark to vessels coming from the westward, and is 26 feet higher than any part of Malta. This island has a greater depth of soil, is more undulated, and more fruitful than the former, but offers inlets only for the smaller craft. As a passing observation we may say, that the ancients describe Gozo as being surrounded with good harbours, which tells volumes about the insignificance of their navies.

In the channel between these two islands is another, named *Cumino*, two miles in length, and one in breadth; near this is the rock *Cominotto*, which name shows the playful way the Italian language expresses size, or any other common quality, by slightly varying the ends of words. To the south of the whole is an uninhabited, rocky islet called *Filfolà* or *Filfa*, about which we know nothing more than the Maltese proverb, "*See Filfolà and die*," meaning, we presume, ironical ecstasy at the beauty of a barren rock.

It has been supposed that these islands are the remains of a large tract of land which once extended towards the south-west, and which resisted the violence that caused the destruction of the country, of which, if this hypothesis be true, they formed a part. From the sea, their present appearance is that of flat islands, not visible at a greater distance than twenty-four miles, and at no point rising so high as 600 feet above its level.

## 2. EARLY HISTORY OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS.

As the plan of the port gave to the reader a more definite idea of the place than verbal description, so the following bird's-eye view of its history will show at once the principal epochs into which the subject naturally divides itself.

- b.c. 402. The Carthaginians have entire possession of Malta.
- 242. The Romans take it from the Carthaginians.
- A.D. ? The Goths possess Malta.
- 533. Belisarius expels the Goths from the island.
- 870, or thereabouts. The Arabs take possession of it.
- 1120. Roger, the Norman conqueror of Sicily, expels the Arabs.
- 1530. The Maltese islands separated from Sicily by Charles the Fifth, and given by him to the Knights of St. John.
- 1798. The grand-master of the Knights surrenders to General Buonaparte.
- 1800. Surrendered by the French to the English.

A Phœnician colony from Tyre is said to have held these islands as early as the fourteenth century before the birth of Christ; and this people used them as a harbour and a depot for the commerce and civilization flowing from the East, as they are now used for the same purpose by the merchants of the West, who are sending back, upon a counter current, the debt of ages, *not* without the interest. Ulysses, king of Ithaca, one of the Ionian islands, after having taken part in the destruction of the city of Troy in the twelfth century b.c., is said to have wandered, amongst other places, to Sicily, where his companions stole and killed some oxen that were sacred to a heathen god; alarmed for their safety, they took ship and fled, but were wrecked upon a neighbouring island, and all were drowned except Ulysses himself. This island, then called *Ogygia*, is supposed to have been Gozo, close to Malta.

The Tyro-Phœnicians, together with a few small societies of Ionic Greeks, are said to have maintained, under an aristocratic constitution, their independence till the fifth century before the Christian era, when they were assailed by the Carthaginians, to whom, after a feeble resistance, they are said to have submitted. Diodorus of Sicily says that the colonists were very rich; that their houses were large and highly ornamented, and that the people were expert in many trades, and especially for their manufacture of linen [query cotton] cloths, which were held in great esteem for fine and delicate texture. The exact time at which the Carthaginians effected this conquest is not known; they were in possession of the islands, however, in the year 402 b.c. Other accounts say the Greeks succeeded the

Phœnicians, and that it was from them that the Carthaginians wrested them. Like the early history of all countries, the first facts are involved in so much obscurity, that we shall find it more satisfactory to press on to the following epoch.

When the Romans conquered Sicily, they took possession of Malta, and erected it into a *municipium*, which, in their law, denoted that individuals or places were invested with the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen, a title, however, when bestowed upon foreign cities and people, but too often merely nominal in effect. From an oration of Cicero we learn that Verres, a Roman and rapacious prætor of Sicily, was accused, amongst other crimes, of having plundered the temple of Juno at Malta. This is instructive, as telling us the nature of the idolatrous worship then in vogue in the island; but we shall see, when we come to speak of the existing antiquities, that while these Roman fables have all passed away, together with their creeds, the temples of a far higher antiquity remain until to-day. From this we may safely infer that there was an idolatry more deeply rooted as identified with the associations of an earlier age, which the Romans did not eradicate, and to the very altars of this primeval worship we shall be able to introduce our readers in the sequel.

Figs, melons, honey, cottons, &c., were exchanged, at this time, for corn; the linen cloth of Malta was considered as an article of luxury at Rome. As a curious circumstance, it may be mentioned that in a sepulchral urn, not long since discovered at Gozo, was found a coin of Ancient Britain. According to the superstition of the age, a small piece of money was given to the dead to pay their passage across the waters that divide this life from the next existence, and as Britain became a Roman colony before the birth of our Saviour, this provincial coin, struck, as it was customary, at Rome, might easily have passed with its possessors to any other part of that great empire; and, ultimately, according to their superstition, to the pocket of Charon, the reputed waterman of those invisible and doubtful waters.

To this time and place belong the shipwreck of St. Paul, as narrated in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. We are aware that a small island in the Adriatic Sea has sometimes been mentioned as the scene of this part of St. Paul's sufferings, but without any foundation further than the resemblance of the ancient names of the two places. Paul came from Crete, and was on his way to Rome, and Malta was consequently almost in his course, while the other island was not. Paul wintered where he was shipwrecked, together with 275 other persons, and passed from thence at once to Sicily, whereas the smaller and unhealthy Melite of the Adriatic being within half a league of an excellent harbour, and close to a rich mainland, would not have detained all these strangers for such a length of time; nor, having detained them, could they have gone from thence to Syracuse in Sicily, in those times of feeble navigation, without touching at some other port, which, as is evident from the narrative, they did not. Grotius, too, says there was an inscription discovered in Malta, in which the same expression occurred, as is met with in the seventh verse of the twenty-eighth chapter of Acts, "the chief man" of the island, whose father Paul healed; the same Greek word being used by both writers, as if it had been a conventional title of common use. Tradition, also, of the facts, exists in one, and not in the other, of the islands. We have already mentioned St. Paul's Bay; here they say he was shipwrecked, which we believe to be true. St. Paul's Cave is also pointed out to the traveller, and here they say he was imprisoned, but this there is no occasion to receive; the Maltese, however, have ever cherished the general associations with their islands and religion: St. Paul is their patron saint; and although tradition, taken apart from, or in opposition to, other witnesses, is of no value, yet when strengthened by circumstantial evidence, must be allowed to have the weight of an unbroken testimony.

"The barbarous people," then, that showed Paul and his companions no little kindness, were the Roman-Maltese; they kindled a fire, and received every one of the two hundred and three score and sixteen souls, and lodged them courteously, and honoured them with many honours, and when they departed, they laden them with such things as were necessary. This happened A.D. 62, at which time the name of Malta was Melite or Melita.

The Romans maintained their authority over these islands until Rome fell under the power of the Goths: these, in

their turn, were expelled by Belisarius, the general, and afterwards the emperor of the East, in the year 533 A.D. The Arabs conquered Malta about 870 A.D., and having lost possession of it for several years, finally recovered it about 900 A.D., and put the Greek inhabitants, who were subjects of the Eastern empire, and their enemies, to the sword. In 1120, Count Roger, the Norman conqueror of Sicily, took these islands, and expelled the Arabs; and they remained attached to Sicily until that island, together with Naples, fell into the hands of Charles the Fifth, emperor of Germany, who granted them to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John, commonly known, at the present day, as the Knights of Malta.

### 3. EARLY HISTORY OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA.

Then in Palestine,

By the way-side, in sober grandeur stood  
A hospital, that, night and day, received  
The pilgrims of the west; and, when 'twas asked,  
"Who are the noble founders?" every tongue  
At once replied, "The merchants of Amalfi."  
That hospital, when Godfrey scaled the walls,  
Sent forth its holy men in complete steel;  
And hence, the cowl relinquished for the helm,  
That chosen band, valiant, invincible,  
So long renowned as champions of the Cross,  
In Rhodes, in Malta.—ROGERS.

ALTHOUGH it is only forty years since these military friars virtually ceased to exist as an independent order, yet so little is now known about them that we are compelled to say a few words concerning their origin, in order to make the narrative intelligible.

"It is written," says Sir William Segar, "that at the city of Amiens, in Picardie, a province of France, there was borne a certain gentleman, who, in his childhood, had been brought up in learning: and being grown to man's estate, disposed himself to the exercise of arms, and therein long time continued. Afterwards, having attained riper years, he despised the world, and framed himself to a solitary life, as one fully resolved to live in contemplation, unseene of any but God alone. Having sometime remained in that solitary sort, a suddaine desire he had to visite the sepulchre where Christ was buried, which shortly after he did. And to the end that he might with securitie passe the barbarous nations, he appalled himselfe like unto a phisition; by which meane, without impediment, he performed his journey. Thus having passed the difficulties of travell in divers strange countries, he arrived at Jerusalem, and being there, fell into acquaintance with Simon, patriarch of that citie, and in lamenting wise enformed him of the oppression and crueltie offered and dayly used by the Infidels towards the poore Christians in those countreys, whereunto Simon answered, that albeit the Christians in those countreys indured great outrages, yet they of Jerusalem suffered much greater, and should be forced to more, if God did not defend them."

This "certaine gentleman," who was no other than Peter the Hermit, was afterwards sent by the patriarch of Jerusalem to the pope, and temporal powers of Europe, to solicit succour for the Christians of Palestine, "and many great kings and potentates consented to take in hand the recovery of the Holy Land from the oppression of the Infidels." Hence arose the first crusade, the foremost body of which consisted of an undisciplined rabble of 60,000 fanatics, whose path was marked with every species of intemperance, and who were finally cut to pieces by the Turks, upon the plains of Nice, one of the chief cities of the Turkish kingdom of Roum, which then extended from the Hellespont to the frontiers of Syria. But others were behind, and Nice was soon invested by an army of 100,000 knights, including their attendants, besides 600,000 pilgrims, able to bear arms. In seven weeks that city surrendered, and in June of the following year, 1099, the standard of the cross was planted on the walls of Jerusalem.

Two hospitals for the relief of pilgrims had already been founded at Jerusalem, while it was yet under Turkish thraldom, by some merchants of Amalfi, in Italy, one of which was dedicated to St. John, a patriarch of Alexandria. This latter, which had hitherto been a secular establishment, now, in the enthusiasm of the period, became a monastic order: the hospitallers abjured the world, and formally dedicated themselves at the altar as the servants of the poor and of Christ. Gerard, the father of the order, died in the year 1118, or 1120, and was essentially a man of peace; but Raymond du Puis, an ambitious warrior, was chosen as his successor, and, without absolving the monks from their former obligations, to meet the exigencies of the



times, he added others equally arduous. He organized them into three classes, differing in birth, rank, and office: the first consisted of knights of justice, of patrician ancestry, whose duty was to fight; the second of priests, to perform the services of religion in church and camp, and to minister to the sick and wounded; the third class, named *Sergens*, served either in the battle-field or the hospital, as required. Each brother, at his profession, took vows of chastity, obedience, and poverty, all of which were broken in the latter times; and the knights further solemnly swore to defend Christianity with their swords. Their banner was a white cross on a red field, and hence they were often called "the White Cross Knights."

In consequence of the crowd of knights that rallied under this standard, it soon became necessary to divide the order into separate nations, or languages, or tongues, as they have differently been denominated, which at first were those of Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Arragon, Germany, and England. The government of the order was strictly aristocratic, the master, afterwards called the grand-master, being president of the council, and in the exercise of supreme jurisdiction. Princes supplicated to be buried in the habit and harness of these warrior monks; kings were proud to be enrolled under their victorious banner; and Alfonso the First, king of Arragon and Navarre, having no offspring, named the Knights of the Hospital and Temple (an order similar to the former) heirs to both his crowns,—a deed which the subjects of those kingdoms very properly set aside.

In 1187, Jerusalem was taken by Saladin, and the knights, after the entire loss of the Holy Land, in 1291, withdrew to Cyprus. Here they remained eighteen years, when, snatching the Isle of Rhodes from the Saracens, in 1308, they settled there, and for more than 200 years were known by the name of the Knights of Rhodes. Time, however, had not softened the bitter rancour between the Christian and the Turk; and on the morning of the first of January, 1523, the order was compelled to abandon Rhodes to Solyman the First, surnamed the Magnificent, emperor of the Turks; but not before they had endured a long series of disasters with great physical and moral fortitude, and had been deserted by all those "great kings and potentates" of Christendom, who had, in an earlier age, lavished the blood of their subjects upon the sepulchre of Christ in order to convert, by the robbery of conquest, and the wholesale massacres of people, Infidels, to that religion which says, "Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near."

#### 4. COMMENCEMENT OF THE MODERN MILITARY IMPORTANCE OF MALTA.

TOUCHING at Candia, the knights of St. John passed to Messina, in Sicily, where the viceroy invited the grand-master, in the name of the emperor, Charles the Fifth of Germany, to make that city his home; but an enemy, as ruthless, and more subtle than the Turk, drove them forth once more in search of a refuge. The plague suddenly made its appearance; and to escape the contagion, which they had probably themselves brought from the east, they took ship nearly as precipitately as they had done at Rhodes, and sailed to Baia, in the Gulf of Naples, carrying the disease along with them, of which several knights of distinction died at sea during the passage. After a protracted sojourn in Italy, the emperor, Charles the Fifth, ceded for ever to the grand-master and religious fraternity of St. John, "in absolute title and fee simple," all the castles, fortresses, and isles of Tripoli, Malta, and Gozo, upon various stipulations which are foreign to our present subject.

No sooner was this cession rumoured of, than commissioners were sent by the order to survey their new possessions which now consisted of the Maltese Islands, and the town of Tripoli on the coast of Africa. According to this official report, which is a valuable authority, Malta is described as nothing better than a shelterless rock of soft sand-stone, called *tuffa*, six or seven leagues long and three or four broad. The surface of the rock was scantily covered with earth, but of so coarse and arid a kind that grain refused to vegetate in it. It produced, however, abundance of figs, melons, and other fruits, besides cotton and cummin, which, together with honey, were exchanged by the native traders for corn with their Sicilian neighbours. The island had no rivulets, and except in the interior, it was destitute of springs—consequently the inhabitants, as at the present day, had to store up the rain in cisterns. Fuel was so

scarce that wood was sold by the pound; and the natives usually dressed their food on fires made with thistles, or cow-dung dried in the sun. The Citta Notabile, or capital, occupied a rising ground in the centre of the island, and was a paltry, miserable, and defenceless place. The fortifications which commanded the harbours were insignificant and in ruins. The population was, at this time, about 12,000; but an uncultured soil, and the rapacity of corsairs, who made constant descents upon the island, sweeping away whole families into captivity, kept the inhabitants in constant fear and produced the natural results of insecurity.

Gozo was described in the same report as separated from Malta by a channel about a league and a half wide, in the midst of which were two islets called *Cutain* and *Cuminot*. According to the survey, Gozo was eight leagues in circumference, destitute of harbours, and environed by shoals and reefs, but withal blessed with a fertile soil. The inhabitants amounted to about 5000, who dwelt like the people of Malta, in casals, or villages. Their only defence from the corsairs was a badly fortified castle built on a hill.

Constant attacks of Saracens and Turks had completely desolated these islands and their dependencies, and the impoverished inhabitants could barely provide themselves with the necessaries of life. In the year 1516, only fourteen years before this time, all the revenue which the Imperial Governor could wring from them was forty ducats.

The first step to the possession of Malta by the knights was the delivery of the castle of St. Angelo which commanded the most commodious part, to a proper officer under a temporary governor and a captain-at-arms, who was followed by the grand-master himself, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, at the end of the year 1530. It is said that his fortitude almost deserted him when he beheld upon this sterile spot no edifice superior to a fisher's hut, save a dilapidated and almost untenable fortress. He immediately threw up a few defences around the insignificant casal or village which had risen close to the castle of St. Angelo, and at the same time marked out a position for his future capital.

In hopes, however, of a settlement in more fruitful Greece, the order attacked Modon, a town in the Morea, in the following year, 1531, and their conduct in this and similar expeditions should warn us against indulging our sympathies too freely with this or any other self-constituted body of men, who, under the name of religion, or the conventional honour of the world, have worked out the mixed motives of human nature, but motives are too subtle for us to analyze, and chivalry has not yet been judged by its fruits. No natural impulse is so welcome to the individual, no popular enthusiasm is so contagious, as that which offers outlets for the worst of human passions. No fanaticism that has been preached to man has ever been attended with such universal consent as the Crusades, and none ever presented such an amount of crime in the agents, and of suffering in those against whom the contest was waged; and of all the half-monastic, half-military orders which owed their origin to these Crusades, none ever possessed such national power and social responsibilities as the Knights Hospitallers of St. John. While this order was abandoned by the bad and the dastardly of its own society as well as by the puissant nations which left it to struggle single-handed, as at Rhodes, against the empires of the East, we cannot restrain our sympathies from the spectacle of physical endurance and of moral courage which they presented at that period; danger indeed had purified their ranks, and at the last dauntless hearts evinced supreme self-control in closing a sanguinary war, when they could no longer shield those around whom they had stood as a wall of steel, after the stone ramparts of Rhodes had been battered into dust by the tremendous Turkish cannonade which Solyman the Magnificent had forced on with the words, "I myself am fully resolved here to conquer, or end my days; and if I depart from this resolution, let my head, my fleets, my army, and my empire, be for ever accursed and unfortunate." But, no sooner had these troubles passed away, than the very first action which follows betrays the looseness of the convention, which not only allowed, but recognised, in lieu of pay to its soldiers, rapine and violence bought with wholesale murder. We read that, under the fair colours of honourable commerce, these knights, with the sanction of their grand-master, entered the port of Modon, corrupted the captain of the harbour by bribery, intoxicated the Turks who garrisoned the tower of

the mole, and only did not take the city by giving themselves up to every species of violence against property, and life, and honour. Booty to an immense value was carried away to Malta, and while the men, who never injured them, were slaughtered with savage fury, their wives and daughters, to the number of eight hundred, were torn from their homes, and in all this, the knights themselves, "sworn to chastity, obedience, and poverty, as servants of the poor and of Christ," were the chief spoilers. These are the fruits of chivalry. Thus was the banner of the white cross knights tainted again and again.

The pope having refused to countenance the divorce of Catharine of Arragon from her husband, Henry the Eighth of England, the latter sequestered the possessions of all of his subjects who adhered to the see of Rome. Under these circumstances some of the English knights of St. John adjured their order; others, named Ingley, Adrian Forrest, Adrian Fortescu, and Marmaduke Bohus, perished on the scaffold; others died in prison, and the remainder sought an asylum at Malta. The act of the English legislature, by which the order was abolished in our own country, and the property belonging to it confiscated, was dated in the year 1534. L'Isle Adam, the grand-master, received our countrymen, the refugees, with considerable kindness. He was the most illustrious head that ever ruled the knights, and dying in the same year, worn out with care, they wrote upon his grave, "Here lies virtue triumphant over misfortune."

After various predatory attacks upon Greece and the northern shore of Africa, the history of which belongs to that of the order of St. John, rather than to the history of Malta, but all of which were marked with the same atrocious acts as those they did at Modon,—now the Turks were victims, and if these were too powerful, the Jews were devoted to pillage, and now from the Moorish coast maidens of the most illustrious families were reduced to the basest bondage by the Spanish and German soldiers, hired by the order to carry out their ambitious designs, and paid, let it never be forgotten by the reluctant lovers of chivalry, by the property, by the freedom, and the honour of innocent and defenceless females, bought with the blood of their natural protectors. "It would, indeed," says an historian of the order of St. John\*, "be a breach of historical candour not to state, that the warfare was characterized on both sides by sanguinary ferocity. If the Turk and the Moor were cruel and merciless, so was the Christian knight. It was a war of reckless bloodshed and brutal spoliation—a series of legal outrages, which humanity chronicles with regret." After a series of these attacks, and to revenge them, a Turkish fleet arrived off Port Musceit, now called Marsamuscetta, or the Quarantine Harbour, in July 1551. The rocky tongue of land which bounds this port towards the east, and upon which we said the present capital stands, was then called Mount Scceberras. Besides the old capital in the interior of the island, the bourg, or town, was the only place of shelter, capable of holding out any length of time against the invaders. This bourg was protected by the castle of St. Angelo, and after inspecting its capabilities from Mount Scceberras, Sinam Pasha, the general of the Turkish army, preferred, as an easier task, attacking the Citta Notabile in the interior, which was badly garrisoned, and would probably have at once fallen into the hands of the Turks, had they not listened to a false rumour that a Christian armament, under Andrew Doria, the great Genoese captain of his age, was on its way to succour the knights. Sinam immediately raised the siege, and left the island, making, however, a descent upon Gozo, carrying off considerable booty, and sweeping its inhabitants into slavery. Sailing from Gozo to Tripoli, the Turkish expedition took that place, which thenceforth ceased to be one of the dependencies of Malta.

##### 5. COMMENCEMENT OF THE GRAND SIEGE OF MALTA BY THE TURKS.

Commissioners were about this time (A.D. 1551) appointed to superintend the construction of military works, and Leo Strozzi, Prior of Capua, a man of great natural talents and vast experience, was of eminent service in these matters. Port Musceit being entirely without defence, it was proposed that a new town should immediately be built upon Mount Scceberras; but as the treasury of the order was

low, the knights contented themselves with erecting a castle at the extremity of that promontory, and another on Mount St. Julian. The first, then called Fort St. Elmo, and the other Fort St. Michael, thus named after similar towers at Rhodes. The next grand-master, Claude de la Sangle, made very considerable additions to Fort St. Elmo at his own expense, and so completely fortified the peninsula of St. Michael, which, like that of the Bourg, juts out into the Grand Port, that, in honour of him, it was designated the Isle de la Sangle, and has ever since borne that name.

While these works were in progress, Malta was devastated by one of the most terrible hurricanes that ever burst over that port. The waves, heaped into mountains by conflicting blasts, rolled with irresistible fury into the harbour; four galleys were sucked into the vortex of a whirlpool; the houses near the shore were thrown down, and even the Castle of St. Angelo tottered to its foundations. In half an hour the wind subsided as suddenly as it had risen, but in that short space of time six hundred persons perished.

The grand-master La Sangle died in 1557, and was succeeded by John de la Valette, one of the most illustrious commanders the order ever possessed. Shortly after the commencement of his reign, five Maltese galleys took a Turkish galleon, which had on board some females belonging to the household of the emperor Solymán. This was the greatest insult that could be offered to a Turk. The Kislar Aga and the Odalichi urged vengeance; the Imam of the Grand Mosque publicly invoked him to redeem the slaves; the people lifted up their voice, and Solymán, fanned into wrath, solemnly swore by his beard to extirpate the order.

The forces of the island consisted of 700 knights, besides serving brothers, and about 8500 soldiers. In anticipation of an attack, a great iron chain, supported on casks and beams of timber, was carried across the mouth of the harbour of the galleys, and John de la Valette was at his post. He fulfilled, at one and the same time, the duties of the hospitaller, the private soldier, the engineer, the artillery, and the captain of the host. One hour he was busied in the hospital, the next superintending the pioneers, and frequently grasped the mattock and the spade by way of example. "A formidable enemy," said he, speaking to a full conclave of his knights, "are coming like a thunder-cloud upon us; and, if the banner of the cross must quail to the unbeliever, let us remember that it is a signal that Heaven demands from us the lives which we have solemnly devoted to its service. He who dies in this cause dies a happy death; and, to render us worthy to meet it, let us renew at the altar those vows which ought to make us not only fearless but invincible in the fight." The solemn ceremonial followed,—the eucharist was partaken of,—temporal pursuits and gratifications were for the time renounced,—private animosities were abandoned, and bending in devoted brotherhood before the symbol of their faith, they vowed to perish rather than let that be profaned, forgetful that their own bad passions had polluted it at Modon and at Coron, at Goletta and at Tunis.

The mistake was in turning against the unbeliever the zeal that should have burnt within and purified themselves; but it was no false alarm which had driven them to their altar. The Turkish fleet, consisting of 159 oared vessels, having on board 30,000 soldiers, under the command of the pashas Mustapha and Piali, arrived May the 18th, 1565. A squadron of store-ships, carrying the heavy artillery, horses and munition, accompanied the fleet. In the course of that and the following night, the whole of the Turkish army disembarked, and Fort St. Elmo was the point at which the attack was first commenced. Ramparts were raised by means of wooden platforms, and on the 24th of May, a battery of ten guns, each of which carried a ball weighing eighty pounds, two sixty pound culverins, and a basilisk of enormous dimensions, which threw stone bullets that weighed one hundred and sixty pounds, were brought to bear upon the fort. Every shot told, but the fort still held out. In a single attack the Turks lost 3000 chosen men, and the order a third of that number and twenty knights.

One of the means of defence is a curious instance of the barbarous warfare of the age. Large hoops, made of light wood, after being dipped in brandy, were rubbed over with boiling oil, and then covered with cotton, soaked in a combustible preparation, two ingredients of which were gunpowder and saltpetre. This operation was repeated three times, allowing each layer of cotton to cool before it was covered by another; and when the hour of battle came, these hoops were set on fire, and thrown into the midst of the

\* *Achievements of the Knights of Malta*, by ALEXANDER SUTHERLAND Esq., to whose book we are indebted for the principal facts in the history of that order.



enemy. Hooped into clusters of unquenchable flame, the Turkish soldiers often lost all discipline; and to prevent the flesh being burnt off their bones, flung themselves into the sea.

At daybreak of June the 16th, a fresh attack was made upon the same fort, and at the end of six hours a retreat was sounded by the Turks, who left two thousand of their dead behind them. Hitherto Fort St. Elmo had been reinforced by fresh troops from the bourg, but now the enemy effected a lodgment on Cape Gibbet, at the entrance of the Grand Post, and completely invested the fort, and on the 21st of June attacked it again with all the chosen battalions of their army. Thrice did the janizaries rush into a breach in the walls, and as often were they repulsed with immense slaughter, till night separated the combatants. The knights without the besieged fort vainly attempted to throw themselves in for the rescue; those within, anticipating their fate with a stern and tranquil fortitude, partook of the most holy sacrament of their religion.

At sunrise on the 23rd of June, thirty-two pieces of cannon opened the battle of the day with their terrible voice. In four hours only sixty souls remained in the fort, to defend the breach against those without. At length the breach was cleared; not a knight nor soldier remained alive, and after the loss, if the Maltese chronicles be true, of 8000 men on the part of the Turks, and of 300 of their own knights, besides 1300 hired soldiers, Fort St. Elmo was lost and won. When entered by Mustapha Pasha, the Turkish leader was so astonished at the insignificance of its fortifications, that he exclaimed, in reference to the Bourg, "What resistance may we not look for from the parent when it has cost us the bravest of our army to humble the child?" Mustapha ordered the breasts of the slain knights to be gashed in the form of a cross, and their hearts torn out, and their lacerated and headless bodies, clothed in their battle-vests, to be tied to planks and flung into the sea, in order that they might be drifted down the harbour, and meet the eye of the grand-master. After a burst of tears at the sight of his mutilated knights, La Valette ordered all the Turkish prisoners in the city to be massacred, and the Maltese artillerymen, loading their guns with the bleeding heads of the victims, fired them, instead of balls, into the Turkish camp.

These revolting acts must be recorded if we would teach or learn the fruits of that savage fanaticism which tempered the Crusades, as well as the military orders to which these gave birth. Only a month had passed since the very men who committed these acts, at which the savage would recoil, had rushed to the altar of their religion, which they called Christian, and there had vowed, upon the eucharist of their faith, to die for the sake—of what? Let the spirit that impelled them answer that, and though verily the men themselves knew not what spirit they were of, shall we, who are far removed from the dark shadows which obscured the age in which they lived, and which at once account for, and in part palliate their barbarities—shall we suffer our judgment to be dazzled by the light of poetry, which time and fancy fling over the chivalry of the past, and shut our eyes to the sickening, but stern realities of the history before us? It is not safe to look upon the glory of their military state, without closely searching for the nature of the means, whether good or bad, that supported that magnificent array; nor must we receive their own details of their motives, without consulting the written records of what they did after they had obtained the means of carrying out the apparent objects of their enthusiasm.

#### 6. TERMINATION OF THE TURKISH SIEGE.

THE Turks proceeded, in the next place, to invest the entire peninsulas of La Sangle and the Bourg; seventy cannon began the battering, and on the 5th of July the Pasha ordered all his guns to open simultaneously upon the two towns. The whole island trembled with the incessant roar of the artillery, and considerable breaches were made in the advanced works. The arrival of the viceroy of Algiers, with 2000 chosen soldiers, appeared to seal the fate of the order of St. John. Candalissi, the lieutenant of the viceroy, backed with 4000 men, made good his landing upon an uncovered part of the beach, at the extremity of La Sangle, and for a time had indeed planted the Moslem flag upon an outwork; but after several hours of hard fighting, the Turks were driven back, leaving about 3500 dead upon the rock. At the same time, young Hassan, the viceroy, stormed the castle of St. Michael, and he

too, after a conflict which lasted five hours, was compelled to retreat, leaving the flower of his Algerines lifeless at the foot of the ramparts. And, now, having as he thought worn out the physical energies of the knights, it being mid-day, the Turkish general ordered the janizaries, the pride of his army, to rush into the deadly gaps which Hassan had abandoned. After a fatal volley of musketry from the Maltese, man closed with man, and the battle became a series of single combats. Warrior grappled warrior in desperate strife, and separated only when one or both fell mortally wounded to the earth. Stones, fireworks, and boiling oil were poured upon the enemy at the foot of the rampart, but the darkness of the night alone dislodged the Turks from their position.

The Turkish batteries once more opened upon the towns with redoubled activity, and the contest daily grew more desperate. The Christians, though almost always victorious, saw their numbers decrease with fearful rapidity. For four succeeding days the best of Turkish blood was lavished upon the walls of La Sangle, and on August 7th, after four hours of incessant fighting, the fort of St. Michael was nearly won. The Christians, few in number, and exhausted by unnatural efforts, were losing heart, when, to their astonishment and joy, a retreat was suddenly sounded along the Turkish line. A false alarm that succours had arrived from Christendom had robbed the pasha of the victory which was almost within his grasp.

If the indomitable valour of the knights should weary the patience of the reader, what must have been its effect upon the Ottoman general? To put an end to the siege, a simultaneous attack was made on August 18th, upon the castle of St. Michael and the bastion of Castile, with the resolution of continuing it night and day, by means of fresh troops, till the towns were taken. The attacks, though interrupted, were frequent, but the month of September commenced without any impression having been made upon the Christians. They indeed had almost won the battle, for the Turkish general became convinced that famine alone could reduce the city, and famine threatened to reduce his camp first.

And now arrived the long looked-for allies from Europe 6000 troops from Sicily were landed at Melleha Bay upon the north-west shore of Malta, and without waiting to ascertain their real strength, the pasha at once retreated on board his fleet. When, however, he learned their number, ashamed of his precipitancy, he relanded his troops, and advanced into the interior of the island in search of the allied army. He found them intrenched on a hill, flanked by narrow defiles, and consequently difficult of access. Della Corna, their generalissimo, contrary to his own wishes, was induced to move down the hill and meet the enemy. The conflict that ensued was short and decisive; for at the first onset the Turkish line began to waver, and a charge in their flank by Vincent Vitelli, a valiant Italian captain, completed their discomfiture, and the pasha himself fled. As the Christians were chasing the fugitives to the beach, transfixing with their short spears every panting Turk that dropt exhausted in their path, Hassan of Algiers, who lay in ambush among the rocks, dashed headlong into the battle, and for a time balanced the chances of victory, till Maltese succour compelled all the Turks to re-embark. In the same hour that the remnant of his once formidable army retreated on board their galleys, the Turkish leader ordered the anchor to be weighed for Constantinople.

In this memorable siege 25,000 Turkish soldiers perished, and, at the last, the Maltese garrison barely numbered 600 effective men. History scarcely offers a parallel of such successful suffering as was displayed on the part of the besieged. Solymán, whose pride was wounded by the issue of this war, declared that in the following spring he would appear in person before the walls of Malta, and at once raze its fortifications, and depopulate the island, or die in the undertaking. At the instigation of La Valette, however, the arsenal at Constantinople was set on fire by hired incendiaries, and a vast number of galleys that were being built for the expedition against Malta were destroyed. This compelled Solymán to postpone his attack, and, before he could equip another fleet, war called him to his Hungarian frontier, where he died, A.D. 1566.

#### 7. FOUNDATION OF VALETTA, AND OF OTHER PUBLIC WORKS.

THE death of the emperor of the Turks, the enemy of Malta and of Christendom, left the grand-master leisure to repair

his ruined towns. To perpetuate the late victory, the name of the Bourg was changed to that of Citta Vittoriosa, or the Victorious City. The Fort St. Elmo was to be extended and a new town founded upon Mount Scceberras, and to carry on these works upon a magnificent scale, the Christian world was successfully appealed to for funds, and engineers and artificers were invited from every part of Italy, to carry out the plans of the grand-master, who laid, on the 28th of March, 1666, the first stone of the new city. Upon this stone was an inscription in the Latin language, to the effect that the grand-master, La Valette, taking into consideration the perilous siege which had lately terminated, had determined to build a town on Mount Scceberras, the better to check any future descents of the barbarians. The new city was named, by universal consent, the city of La Valette; to which the epithet "Umilissima," or the most humble, was added as indicative of the humility of the order.

For nearly two years the grand-master spent almost the whole of his time with the masons and artificers on Mount Scceberras, and upon a scarcity of money occurring, had the boldness to issue a brass coinage of nominal value on which was inscribed, "non æs, sed fides," that is, not money, but credit. The punctuality however with which this spurious currency was withdrawn, as often as remittances arrived from Europe, never allowed public confidence to give way. In 1568 John de la Valette died from the effects of a coup-de-soleil, and was succeeded in the grand-mastership by Peter de Monte. In 1571, the new city was so far finished as to be made the seat of government, and in the same year, the order of St. John took part in the memorable sea-fight off Lepanto in Greece, "the first great action," says Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, "in which the naval supremacy of the Ottoman empire was successfully disputed by Christian arms."

Passing over a period of thirty years, we come to the accession of Alof de Vignacourt, of whom we give a copy of a full length portrait taken by Caravaggio, the celebrated Italian painter. Alof de Vignacourt was a man of great talent, and enjoyed a long and brilliant reign, during which he completed the greatest public work that man could raise at Malta. We have stated in our introduction that there are few springs and no streams upon the island; the climate at the same time is one of the hottest on earth, either within or without the tropics, at least this is the opinion of sailors from whatever part of the globe they visit it; water, then, in this burning climate is the first essential of animal existence, and of this there was no general supply except that afforded by the rainy season. Choosing the largest spring in the southern part of the island where these are most abundant, Vignacourt raised upon arches an aqueduct, nine and a half English miles in length, in order to carry water into the city of Valetta. He erected public fountains and connected these, both with the aqueduct itself, and with subterranean cisterns, in which the natives until to-day preserve the rains of winter, which, when dry, could now be fed by the artificial supply. He has quenched the thirst of man and beast from that time until now; and honour to the name of Vignacourt, far above those whose names are written in the blood they spilt!

The same grand-master also added to the defences of the island, by erecting strong works at the different harbours, as well as upon the little island of Cumino. His reign, however, was not one of unbroken peace, for not only were his knights engaged in frequent contests with the Turks at sea, but the latter sent sixty galleys against Malta, in 1615, and landed 5000 men with the intention of carrying off the inhabitants into slavery; but the Maltese, having had timely notice of their approach, retreated with their property into various strongholds, and the Ottomans, unable to attempt a siege, had to re-embark without capturing a single man.

This insecurity of the open country might have led us to suppose that the welfare of the lower classes of the Maltese was but ill looked after by the order, had not the population, which is, within a certain limit, a test of the physical condition of a people, rapidly increased since the great siege. When the Turks raised the famous siege, and left the island in 1565, the population of Malta did not greatly exceed 10,000, but in 1632, after a period of sixty-seven years, it amounted to upwards of 51,000 souls, exclusive of the members of the order, and familiars of the inquisition, who had settled there. In 1636 Paul Lascaris Castelar was elected grand-master, and founded a library in 1650, for the benefit however of the knights only, but which is now in existence as the property of the present government of the island. The same person bought, about the same time, the West India Islands, named St. Christopher, St.

Bartholomew, St. Martin, and St. Croix, for the fee simple of 5000*l.* sterling, which included all the plantations, slaves, and stores, and *debts*,—and the annalist says the same was a most unprofitable speculation for the order. Twelve years afterwards these islands were sold to some French merchants, and a little more than a century from the date of these transactions English proprietors were to be found in the same islands, who, from one year's revenue of a single plantation, could have paid the whole purchase-money which the Maltese knights had given for them.

The grand-master Redin, who died in 1660, erected a chain of watch towers, for the defence of the coast, and Nicholas Cotoner, anticipating an attack from the Turks, invited an eminent Italian engineer, named Valperga, to visit the island, and under his superintendence, an enclosure called the Cotonera was added to the fortifications. It is an immense work, little short of three miles long, and consists of nine bastions and two demi-bastions, connecting the Isle de la Sangle with the Bourg, or Citta Vittoriosa, and embracing all the heights which commanded the ancient defences of both places. The area within was sufficiently extensive to contain the whole population of the island, with their cattle and effects. The grand-master was blamed for the magnitude of the work, as beyond the means of the order, but he boldly commenced in 1670, and carried it on unremittingly for a period of ten years, when the treasury was exhausted, and thirty years elapsed before any further measures were adopted for its completion. La Floriana, which Lascaris built to defend Valetta, was enlarged by Cotoner; and a new fort, called Ricasoli, was erected on the headland which commands the entrance of the Grand Port. At the same time, a lazaretto was built on what was then an islet in Port Musceit, but which has since been changed by art into a peninsula.

As we have spoken freely of the dark morality of the order of St. John, we are only the more relieved by the contrast of an occasional brighter spot. Sanguinary conflicts in Greece against the Turks, in which the order had been allies of the Venetians, had been so fatal to the Christians about the year 1690, that a large portion of the male population of the Maltese islands had been swept off, and mostly widows only, and orphans, remained to suffer the miseries of destitution. Through the instrumentality of the grand-master, Adrian de Vignacourt, a kinsman of Alof de Vignacourt, a fund was raised for the support of the sufferers,—“an incident,” says the historian, “more honourable to his memory than if he had died the victor of an hundred fights.” Malta, too, was violently shaken by an earthquake on January 11th, 1693, which continued for three days, and laid several buildings in ruins, and the same shocks extended to Sicily with greater violence, and the town of Augusta was almost wholly destroyed, but no sooner was this disaster known at Malta than a squadron was despatched with supplies to the houseless inhabitants.

## 8. DECLINE OF THE KNIGHTS.

FOR near a century the Maltese navy had been on the decline, and the grand-master, Perillos, who succeeded Adrian de Vignacourt in 1697, built a squadron of decked war-ships, of a much larger size than the galleys, and erected various useful public works, as monuments of his tranquil and honourable reign. A few years after this, Manuel de Villena built a considerable fort on the islet in Port Musceit, which was called Fort Manuel, after the founder, and added a series of magnificent works to the landward defences of the new city, completing the Floriana, which was commenced by Lascaris and enlarged by Cotoner. The good effects of these precautions were soon obvious, for a Turkish fleet of ten ships, which appeared off the port, was so intimidated by the impregnable aspect of the whole island, that, after firing a few guns, its commander held it prudent to retire.

In 1736, we find that Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca succeeded to the grand-mastership, and it is recorded that the merciful tenor of his reign rendered him a blessing to all his subjects, even to the Mohammedan slaves, which, at that time, amounted to about four thousand. By far the greater portion of these enjoyed perfect liberty, as confidential domestics in the households of the knights; but an incident occurred which encouraged them to throw off the yoke of slavery, although, in this case, it was a merciful bondage. It happened that a Turkish galley was brought into Malta by the Christian slaves who had manned her, who had risen upon their Moslem officers while at sea, and subverted their

authority. Among the Turks thus captured was the pasha of Rhodes, a man of eminence; and the grand-master, anxious to propitiate the French, who were allies of the sultan of Constantinople, immediately gave up this distinguished prisoner to the French minister at Malta, who lodged him in a palace, made him a princely allowance, and surrounded him with Turkish slaves. Among these slaves was a negro, the very man whose treachery had sold the pasha into the hands of the Christians while at sea. This wretch, conceiving that he was ill rewarded for his treason, formed the daring project of subverting the government of the knights, and of rendering the Sultan for ever his debtor, by putting him in possession of Malta. The pasha eagerly agreed to promote the scheme; the Turkish slaves were soon involved in the conspiracy; a fleet from Barbary, aware of the project, was to appear off the harbour on the festival of St. Peter and St. Paul, which was held at Citta Notabile, in the interior of the island, and at the hour of the mid-day siesta, those who remained in the city of Valetta were to be massacred. A slave, who held a confidential situation near the grand-master's person, was instructed to enter Pinto's chamber at the hour when the intense heat overpowers all ranks alike with sleep, and decapitate him, and then instantly to exhibit the bleeding head in the grand balcony of the palace, as a signal for the slaves of the other knights to follow his example. All these arrangements were carried on in so secret a manner that no Christian on the island had even a suspicion of their existence; but just before the appointed day, in a moment of passion, aggravated by the effects of wine and opium, the negro quarrelled with a young Persian, a soldier in the grand-master's guard, who was in his confidence, and attempted to stab him; but the youth escaped, and, either through fear or vengeance, at once divulged the formidable conspiracy. The pasha, being under the protection of France, escaped punishment; but about a hundred of those implicated in the plan suffered death. Some were burned alive, some were broken on the wheel, and others were torn to pieces by four galleys rowing different ways.

The struggle between the Christian and the Turk had dwindled into insignificant and piratical contests. The only warlike exploit of Pinto's reign was to bombard several piratical ports, but to small purpose; and, from this date, the cruising of a few privateers constituted the naval demonstration of the knights. "The galleys," says Sonnini, "were armed, or rather embarrassed, with an incredible number of hands; the general alone had 800 men on board. They were superbly ornamented; gold blazed on the numerous basso-relievos and sculptures on the stern; enormous sails, striped with blue and white, carried on their middle a great cross of Malta, painted red. Their elegant flags floated majestically. In a word, everything concurred, when they were under sail, to render it a magnificent spectacle; but their construction was little adapted either for fighting or for standing foul weather. The order kept them up rather as an image of its ancient splendour, than for their utility. It was one of those ancient institutions which had once served to render the brotherhood illustrious; but now only attested its selfishness and decay. The caravans, or cruises of the galleys, were now nothing but parties of pleasure to and from the delicious havens of Sicily; the defence of those superb ramparts, the monuments of the glory of the order, was confided to foreign and mercenary soldiers; and that social energy, which had made one of the greatest empires of the universe to tremble, was now no longer exemplified, except in the sparks of courage struck from a few individuals."

We must not omit perhaps the last worthy action these galleys performed. In the year 1783 a frightful earthquake ravaged Sicily and the southern part of Italy, and in particular the towns of Messina and Reggio; and those inhabitants that escaped alive were exposed, without food or shelter, in the open country. The Maltese galleys were laid up in ordinary at the time intelligence of this disaster reached the island; but they were made ready for sea, notwithstanding, in a single night, and instantly set sail for the scene of desolation, carrying with them medicines, beds, and tents for the relief of the sufferers.



KNIGHT OF MALTA.

ALOF DE VIGNACOURT,  
52ND GRAND-MASTER OF THE KNIGHTS OF ST. JOHN.